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PATTERNS SIXTY

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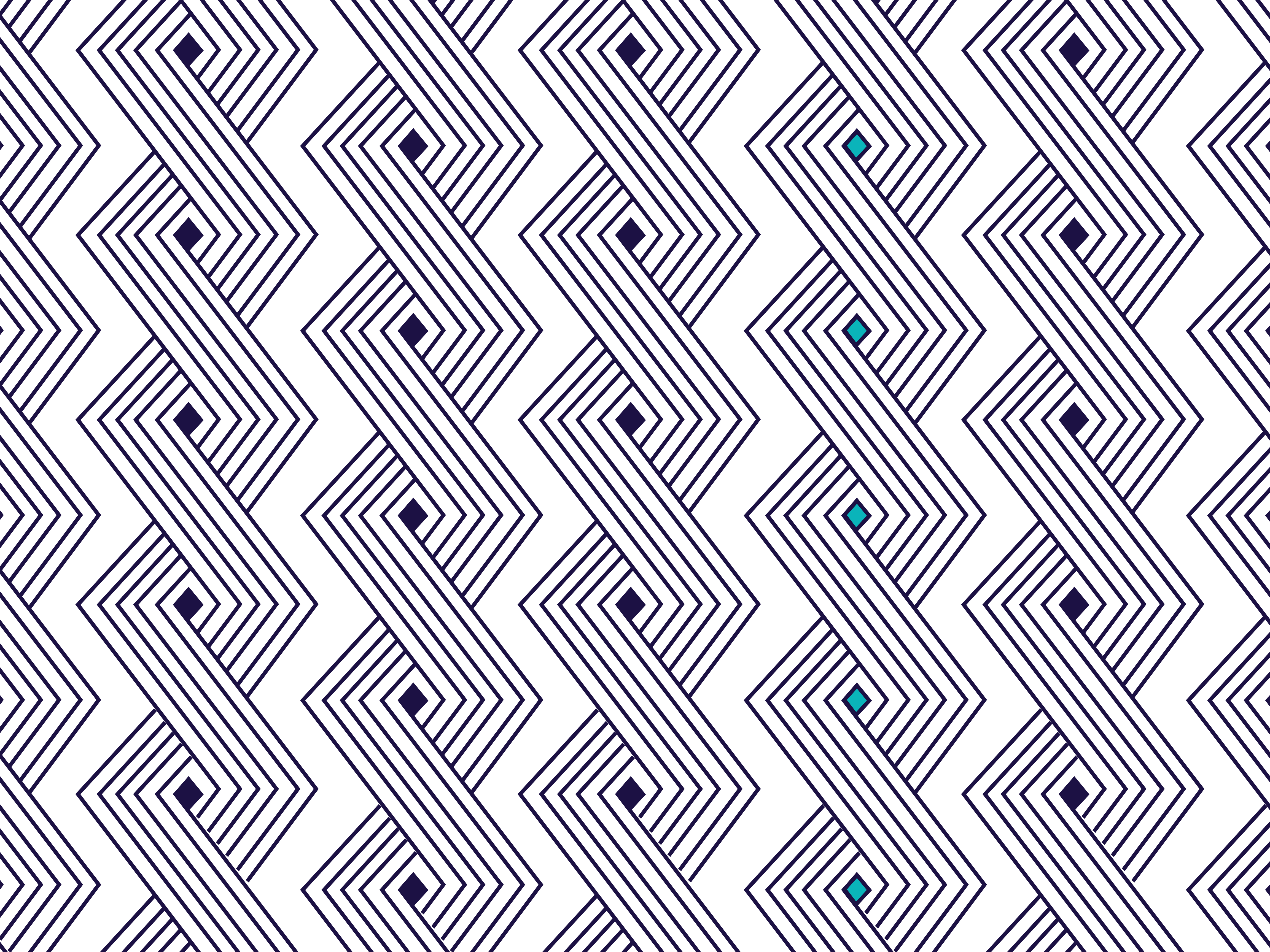

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friends of the arts

SC4 Friends of the Arts is a committed group of businesses, community members and SC4 faculty and staff, that support the arts at SC4, including music, theatre, creative writing and visual arts. We thank you for your continued support and for building campus and community relations through the arts.

Programs and activities supported by Friends of the Arts include:

- Educational Arts Outreach projects in music, theatre and visual art
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- Twilight Free Concert Series
- Special musical performances
- Student, alumni and faculty art exhibitions
- Theatrical productions with the SC4 Players
- *Patterns* magazine

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special awards for writing and art

Readers of Patterns will note that each year five special awards are given, named for past faculty members who had made extraordinary contributions to the arts and literature on campus and to Patterns in particular. The Blanche Redman, Richard Colwell and Kathy Nickerson Awards are given for the highest quality submissions for that year in poetry, fiction and essay writing, respectively. The Patrick Bourke and Eleanor Mathews Awards recognize students who have done exceptional work in a more general sense.

eleanor mathews award

THERESE MAJESKI

For over thirty years, the English faculty of SC4 has awarded the Eleanor Mathews Award for “outstanding creativity, technical skill, and individual style” to recognize student writers for overall achievement in creative writing. (By contrast, the Redman, Colwell and Nickerson Awards recognize the highest quality writing in each specific genre.) Traditionally the Mathews Award has been given to a deserving student who has had work published in Patterns in multiple genres and/or over a number of years. This year we enjoy an embarrassment of riches because, for the first time in recent memory, we have three students with works accepted in all three genres —Therese Majeski, Tempeste Mayvs, and Maria Vallee all have had poems, stories and essays selected for publication in Patterns. This year's Mathews winner is Therese Majeski, in recognition of having had her work selected for publication in the 57th and 58th editions of Patterns, as well as for her outstanding works published this year.

patrick bourke award

RACHEL HENION

The Patrick Bourke Award honors an art or design student who has made a commitment to pursue an advanced degree in one of the visual arts disciplines and has been an advocate and emissary for art at St. Clair County Community College.

This year's recipient is Rachel Henion who is currently completing her associate's degree in graphic design. Rachel is being honored for her dedication to the arts and for the exceptional quality and caliber of the work that she produces.

S A
M A
N T
H A

CERVIDAE

Lauren Senkmajer

ILLUSIONAL HOLES

Stephon Burrell

A PIECE OF CROW

Micharu Hinkley

APPLES

Amber Churchill

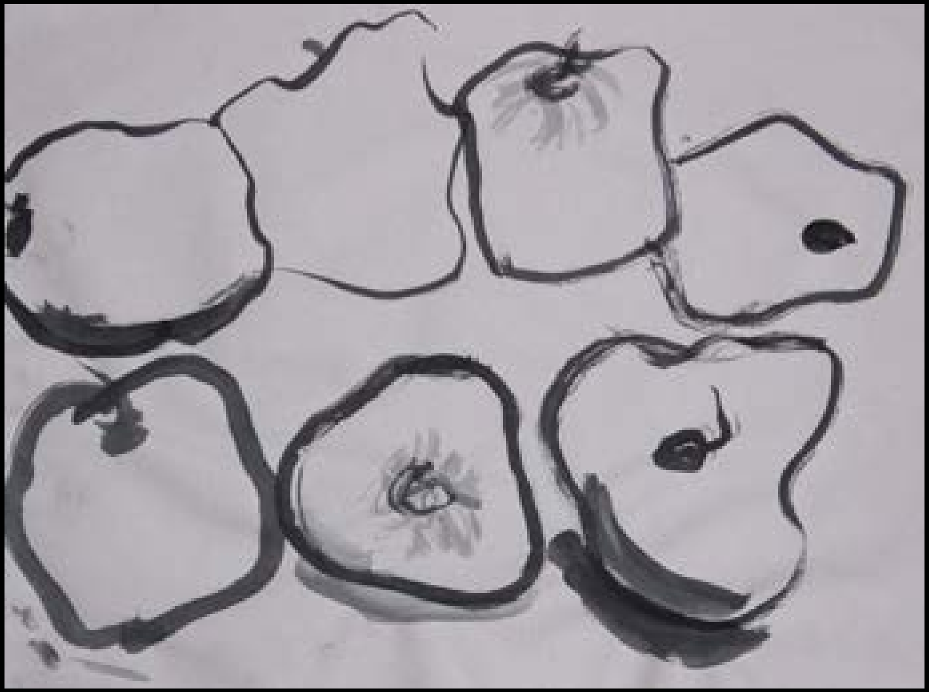
WHATCHAMACALLIT

Lauren Senkmajer

FPO

APPLES

Joella Killion



FPO

ORANGE COLOR SKY

Jacob Sexton

REFLECTED BEAUTY

Michelle Cline

WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME

Kimberly Klnert-Friederichs

SMOKE UP & SMILE

Cody Paris

ANGEL

Kay-lynn Pack

STRENGTH IN FLOWERS

Amber Cline

DUKE

Sabrina Mason

MOTHER NURTURE

Petra Leonard

I AM THE WALRUS

Brenda Kasten

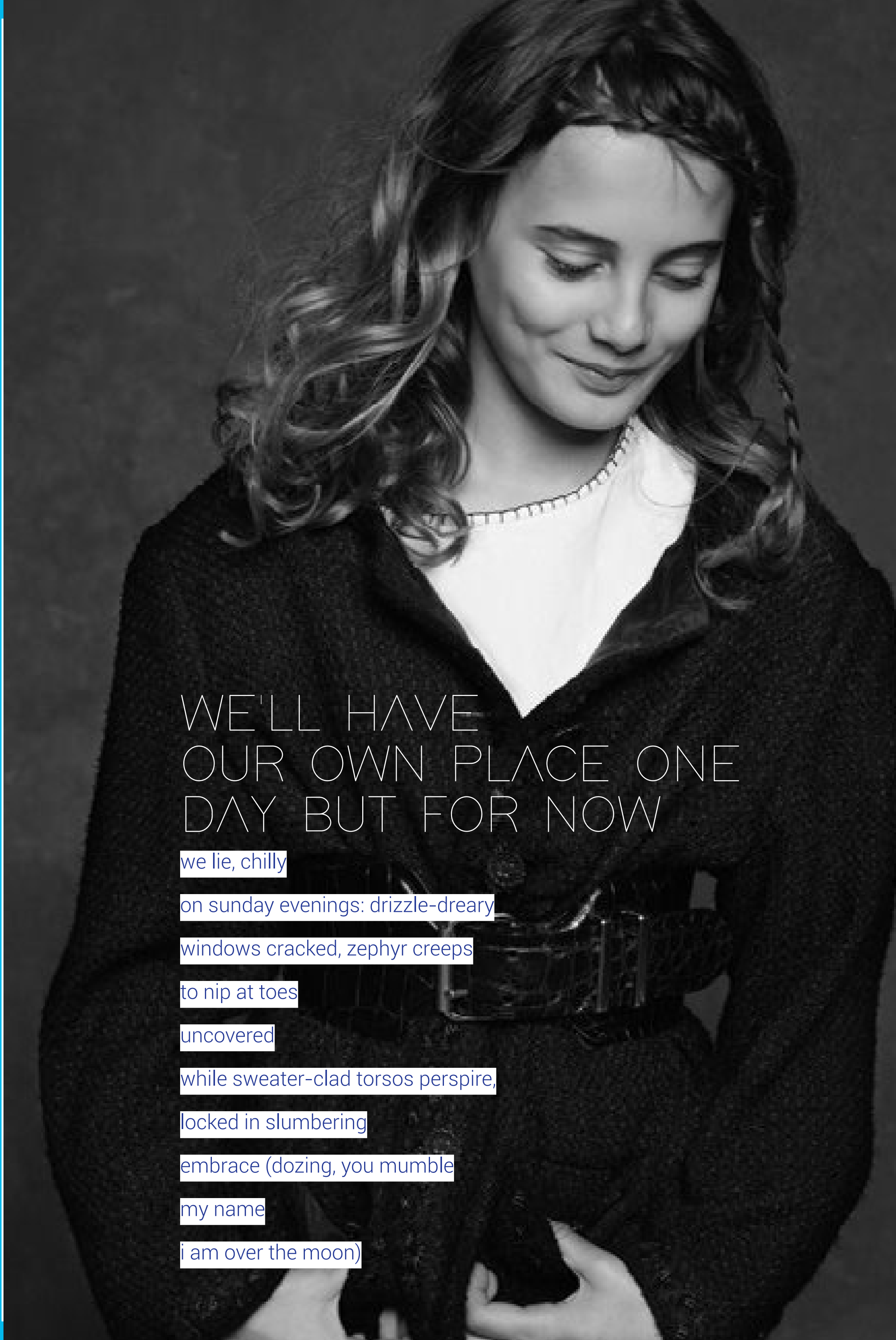
DEATH OF A GYPSY QUEEN

Brenda Kasten

L A U R E N

LAUREN SENKMAJER

1st Place Blanche Redman Award



WE'LL HAVE OUR OWN PLACE ONE DAY BUT FOR NOW

we lie, chilly

on sunday evenings: drizzle-dreary

windows cracked, zephyr creeps

to nip at toes

uncovered

while sweater-clad torsos perspire,

locked in slumbering

embrace (dozing, you mumble

my name

i am over the moon)

PERHAPS

2ND PLACE

Allison Stein

A brave girl counts the white-tailed deer,

Numbers the legs navigating golden wheat stubble

In her daddy's snow-dappled field.

She has memorized the angle of a distant amethyst horizon,

The opacity of wispy clouds at twilight.

A child squints against the lingering sunlit dusk.

A stand of ash trees shelters the field.

Even in wintertime, ephemeral light blazes amid branches,

Incandescent rays spilling through limbs of skeletons.

Her daddy says those frost-capped branches are already dead,

Cold inner bark hollowed by emerald ash borer.

"Body without a heart" is the way to explain this to a child.

The girl runs her fingertips along grooves in the trunk,

Her shoulder blades level with crystallized limbs.

Snow-dust settles upon her footprints in the dormant field.

She remembers a quiet afternoon five Christmases ago

When her father pulled her through the stand of ash on a plastic sled

And the lowest branch hovered infinitely above her eyes.

She smiles thinly.

The horizon is straight and hard,

Wild iridescence restricted to a single blurry line.

And it occurs to her that perhaps the world is not so infinite.

Perhaps this is the only truth—

Lost fawns searching for the tree with a crooked trunk.

FIVE MONTHS

Madeline Pittiglio

A vase of carnations sits
In the middle of my kitchen table.
Velvety soft with ruffled edges,
They are the color of sunshine.

Among the petals was an envelope,
A short and simple note.
Three lines to read,
And I'll reread them again and again.

I want to memorize your handwriting.
The dips in the lines,
You do not dot your I's,
And for some reason,
That makes me smile.

3RD PLACE

ANGRY TODDLER

Alexa Dudley

The struggle with having a round,
Resting bitch face
Is that I walk around
Looking like a toddler who,
All in the same day,
Dropped her sippy cup,
Was told to take a nap,
And was instructed to pick up her toys
When all she wanted to do was play.

My angry toddler face
Has come to defining me.
I don't really know what I'm angry at.
The world? My job?
Myself?
Maybe I'm just angry.
Angry that I can't do what I want.
Angry that I'm not in control.
Angry at everything.
I have a resting bitch face,
but in this world,
who doesn't?

LONELY

Allison Stein

Insomnia,

A quiet song on the car radio at midnight,

Static and tears;

Shadowed reflection in the mirror,

Image of an empty adolescent body

Impressed upon a thin glass wall;

A past self no longer embodied,

Wooden jewelry box with little girls' beads,

Lilac dust in the wind;

A dust-veiled friendship bracelet,

Braided navy and peach,

Thread as fragile as heartstrings;

Velvet photo album,

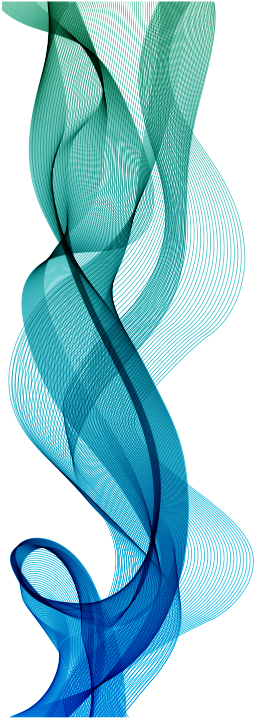
Cluttered with time-faded pictures

Of strangers;

Iridescent colors pooled

Within the iris of an old friend's eye,

The risk to glimpse another heart;



A thousand skeletal cars

Etched against life's rear-view mirror,

Blurry window to a blurrier world;

The eerie hope in stargazing

Under a warm, black tapestry

That belongs to all souls.

MY MOTHER'S WEDDING PHOTO

Brooklyn Wagner

My mother leading me down the stairs
over to where photos lie underneath a table.
Pulling out a brown book with bent edges
The picture slipping out as she begins flipping
through the pages.

Sitting down; placing the picture on the table
My eyes following the mixture of tulle and lace
Across her neck, wrapping around her shoulder,
and down her back.
Layers of delicate fabric covering her silky brown hair.
Her hands holding a bundle of red tulips.

Glancing at her once more, I reach for my bag
Holding my camera over the photo as its shutter
Clicks.
Her picture now living in my collection,
Though she's staring blank across the room.

YOUR YEARS

Haily Stager

They say that each ring within the trunk of a tree
Represents its growth in one season
From winter to spring, from sunshine to storm
A story written in a single line.
But what about the lines across your skin
Your chest and your stomach
Roaming along your arms and down your legs?
Each one a fault line, a sign, a memory
A defining moment in a history belonging only to you
A life not protected by bark or branches or leaves
But a life that's been lived.
As we walk along these bright, cold hallways
Void of any life
You talk to me about that house on the hill
Where your children and garden grew
And as I hear your laughter
Slightly weaker than it once was
I realize, these are your rings
And there will be more.

MY GRANDFATHER'S CLARINET

Eilish Warner

Gently, I opened the creaking clarinet case,
With its rusty locks,
And musty smell.
I leaned over the lonely clarinet,
barren and cold in its burgundy velvet case.
It still had the allure it had in its youth.

My hands slid over the mouth piece.
It had a deep scar in it from where teeth used to sit
When he would play for hours on end.
I ran my fingers across the deep valley,
smiling tenderly.

Very gently, I pulled out the two parts
of the fragile, weathered body
with the dozens of keys and corks.
The silver was dull and the corks were a putrid brown,
yet the keys held strong as my fingers glided
through the highest soprano note
to the lowest tenor.

I clasped the bell of the clarinet,
slightly heavy in my shaking hands.
My fingers brushed against the scrapes on the bottom
where he must have put the slim instrument
on the floor.
This clarinet, his clarinet, was so bright and lovely,
With the light from the lamp shining off of it.
I envisioned his fingers running all over it,
his most intimate lover.

I put the clarinet together,
one piece at a time.
The body was delicately joined together with the bell,
the corks slowly slipping together.
Then I twisted the mouthpiece onto the rest of the clarinet,
Completing its glorious reunion.

While I held the clarinet close,
I imagined him playing his closest friend,
and his sweet, slow classical music sang in my mind.

DARK WHISPERS

Autumn Rockerfeller

All I see is fat, cellulite and stretch marks that scream my name
I feel a burning pain in my abdomen,
And my head feels empty and I can't focus on anything anymore
All that's normal is the bottle of pills at the bottom of my purse

The clothes hung off me at the beginning
The compliments nearly knocked down the door
But soon my head left the clouds,
And found the nearest toilet

The calorie counting was the only math I could focus on,
And the cocoa butter was the only butter I would touch
Friends became scarce,
But the treadmill consumed most of my time

I began to feel weak and tired,
But the voices called me fat
The screams only got louder,
Until the pain took over

The deep scarlet blood fell from my lips,
And the ulcers' pain was agonizing
The voices were still whispering,
And I was still weak

The whispers transferred from my head to my friends,
All they talked about was my health
I couldn't bare to listen
Losing more weight was all I thought about

My head was spinning
My ribs were showing
All I wanted to do was lose
And eventually I did

THE GIRL WHO WANTED TO TRAVEL

Emily Newby

You stand on top of a mountain in the picture I have of you.

6017 feet up where the Eagle used to hide.

A pale pink blouse tucked into ivory colored shorts

Short black hair, no grey in sight.

A smile spread wide across your face

And a look in your eyes,

One that I have not seen before.

You lean carelessly against the railing

The only thing separating you from death.

You are relaxed as you take in your surroundings

Wunderschön

That beautiful land, where the sky meets the mountains

And the roads are never straight.

Where W is pronounced as V,

And beer is served by the litre.

This was the life you wanted.

You were the girl who wanted to travel,

To expand her world.

You found your life in a foreign land,

But, is it the life you wanted to find?

Did you know that two years later,

You would be giving up that life,

For a family of your own?

Now I'm the girl who wants to travel.

But, will I get to see the world

Before life smothers my dream?

INSTASHAM

Emma Falls

Social media, or as the old people like to call it:

major time waster

Let's be honest, social media is my life. Or at least, it makes real life hazier

Hashtag, social media isn't real life

But if I don't post that perfect selfie, it'll cause my followers to attack my insecurities with a knife

Omg, this picture looks too much like me *delete*

Ugh, this one looks edited enough to see *delete*

Okay, I've narrowed it down to 58 selfies, which one do you like?

Wait, which filter? I like Valencia, but will that make them double tap for the unlike?

Sometimes when I'm scrolling through Instagram, I don't notice people are talking to me

I never have to talk to anyone, I just hit them up with that text written apology

My mom just called me for dinner, doesn't she understand that evening has the perfect light for my selfie face?

Ugh she's so annoying. Food isn't as important as my follower database

My mom tells me that I spend too much time on Instagram

Ha she's just jealous because her lack of devoted followers makes her feel like a sham

Of course, it would help if she even had an Instagram account...

But she obviously doesn't get one, since her followers compared to mine, will never surmount

All the old people tell me social media is a time sucker

But it's not, I've made so many internet friends, and I have more likes than her

I follow other people and aspire to be like them

But it goes farther than aspiration, it turns into greed and discontent

That's the good thing about Instagram, I covet other people's lives, money, and things

I start to notice my own flaws, and I realize how bad I have it compared to people who are living like kings

This girl posts a picture of her on her 16th with a brand-new charger

Her parents gave it to her as a gift, they didn't even charge her

Instagram makes me realize the things I'm entitled to but don't get

She got a charger, so I deserve a corvette

See? Instagram isn't a time waster, it's a life changer

But be careful, because the more you're on the internet, the more your perceptions of the world start to falter

You might not notice until you're walking down the aisle, towards the alter

Walking, walking, confidence lost with every step as you realize you don't know anything about him

Other than the fact that his Instagram bio reads "in love with her and love going to the gym"

CORNER STORE

Nick Wilson

Outside wrapped in red, like an old barn

The old 'Chipewah one stop' as they called it,

The locals would just say Chip,

Weathered wooden benches

Like those that you would sit on at grandma's;

Marks on the exterior from our bikes leaning,

Old front doors opened with a creek,

Floors as tan as our skin, and as dirty as our clothes

Welcomed in like it was family visit,

Where friendships have grown like a pine tree

With the sap binding the bond at the old corner store;

Sip on sodas as we gaze upon the horses in their back stables,

Not a worry in the world, freedom.

DEPRESSION

Gabrielle Borneman

Trying to bring out

The best of life everyday

One step at a time.

RAIN

Mackenzie Visga

Sometimes I wish I could go back in time,
Not to change anything but to feel a couple things twice,

To be in the exact moment of complete bliss,
To feel infinite again and relive those moments,

I remember the rainstorms as a little girl,
The rain fell intensely on the ground and formed into puddles,

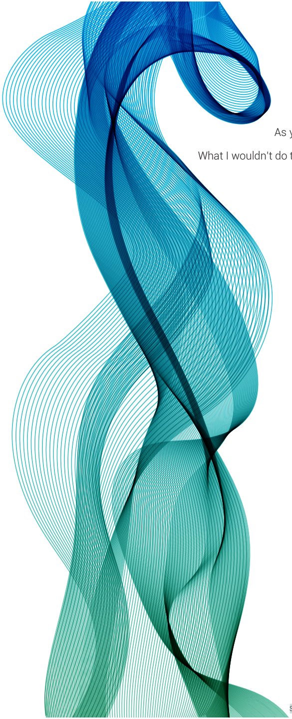
Times like this we dashed through the front door into the yard,
Dressed in our little yellow coats and black rubber boots,

We splashed and splashed until we were soaking wet,
You danced around with a smile on your face,

We grew old and we went our separate ways,
Time went on and the distance grew,

Now I stand in front of you looking down,
Once again in a puddle but there's no splashing,

The stone reads your name,
Lightening echoes like your laughter,



As you lay still I continue to move on,
What I wouldn't do to be dancing with you in the rain.

SUNFLOWERS

Savana Grewe

My mother was young,

and as free as the sunflowers in the back field.

Every time Jim would pick her one, her eyes hardened a little more.

The golden discs reminded her of everything she had lost.

Or what she had given up, rather, to be with me.

“A family,” Jim called it.

She left soon after that,

and my brother went along,

though I didn’t know of him at the time.

I think she left to find a new flower,

because the ones Jim picked darkened her soul.

Jim died a little that day,

his grip on his morning coffee was never quite the same.

And the longer I waited at the back door,

watching the sun give new life to the flourishing garden,

and the rusty leaves fall from the tree tops,

neither was mine.

We carried on as zombies for seven months,

in the house my mother had painted reds and yellows and blues.

Jim planted a rose bush one day.

“Something so lovely always hurts,” he said.

Was he speaking of the pointed thorns?

I’m still not sure, but he left me at Aunt Donna’s the next day,

and hasn’t been back since.

The people who had given me life sucked it right back out of me.

I lost both of them.

Last week, a boy picked me a sunflower,

I hid my face and ran off in a puddle of tears,

losing him as well.

Must I pass through this hell alone?

Must my heart ache at the sight of a family playing in the park?

Must my life be decided for me?

Aunt Donna says no,

but the sunflowers tell me otherwise.

ROSES

Katie Flenna

What is it about a rose, causing
a loss of certainty in the beauty of its simplicity.
From the lively blood red to the warm snow white,
the colors are blinding as they gracefully grow
upward from the earth all day and night.

The luscious sweet aroma filters
heavily throughout the air,
violating our every sense
leaving nothing to spare.

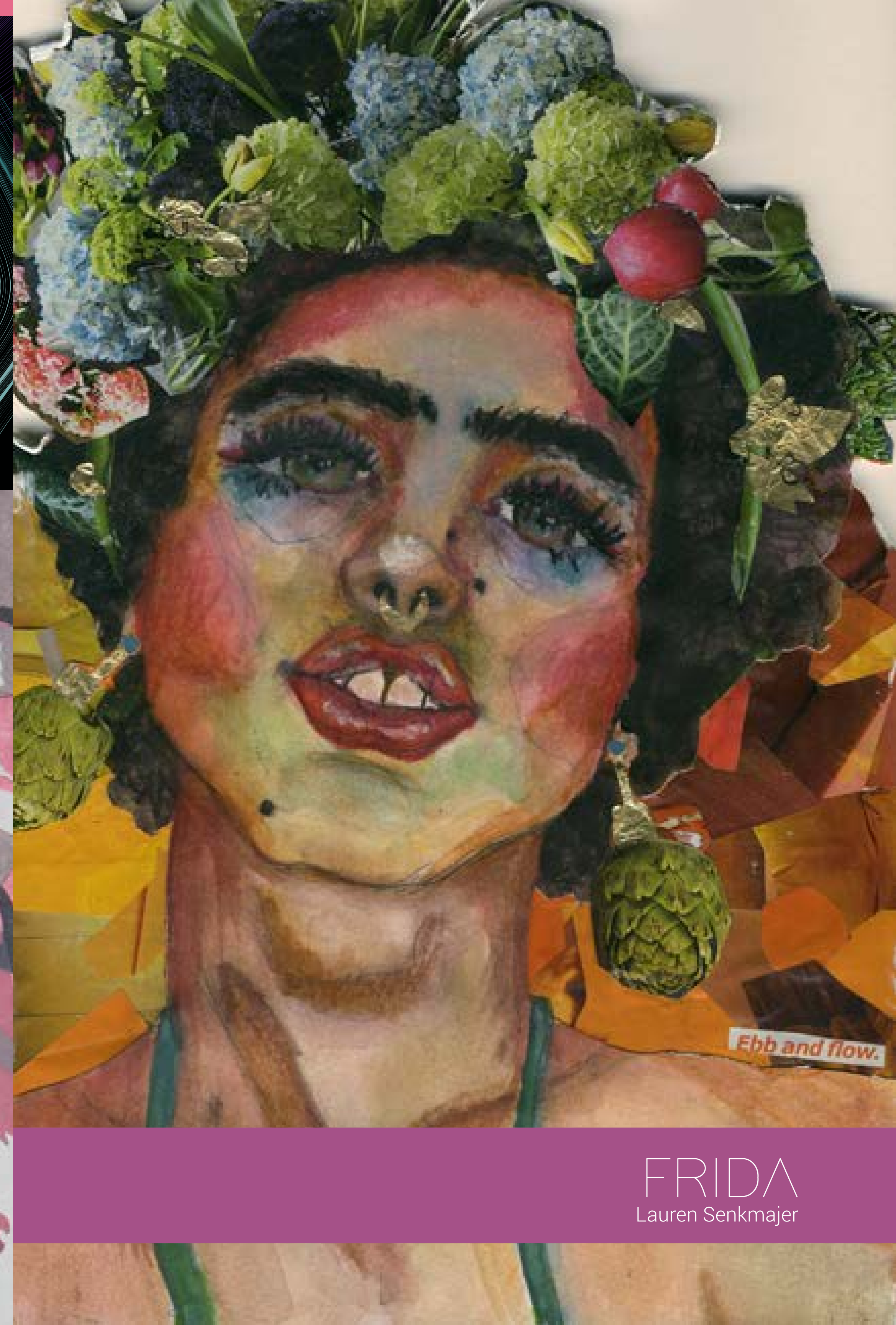
Layer upon layer the silk petals falsify
momentary lapsing judgment.
Razor sharp thorns incise like knives
reminding that beauty is not treasure.

TOP OF THE WORLD? OR THE BOTTOM?

Emma Falls

MISSING CONTNET

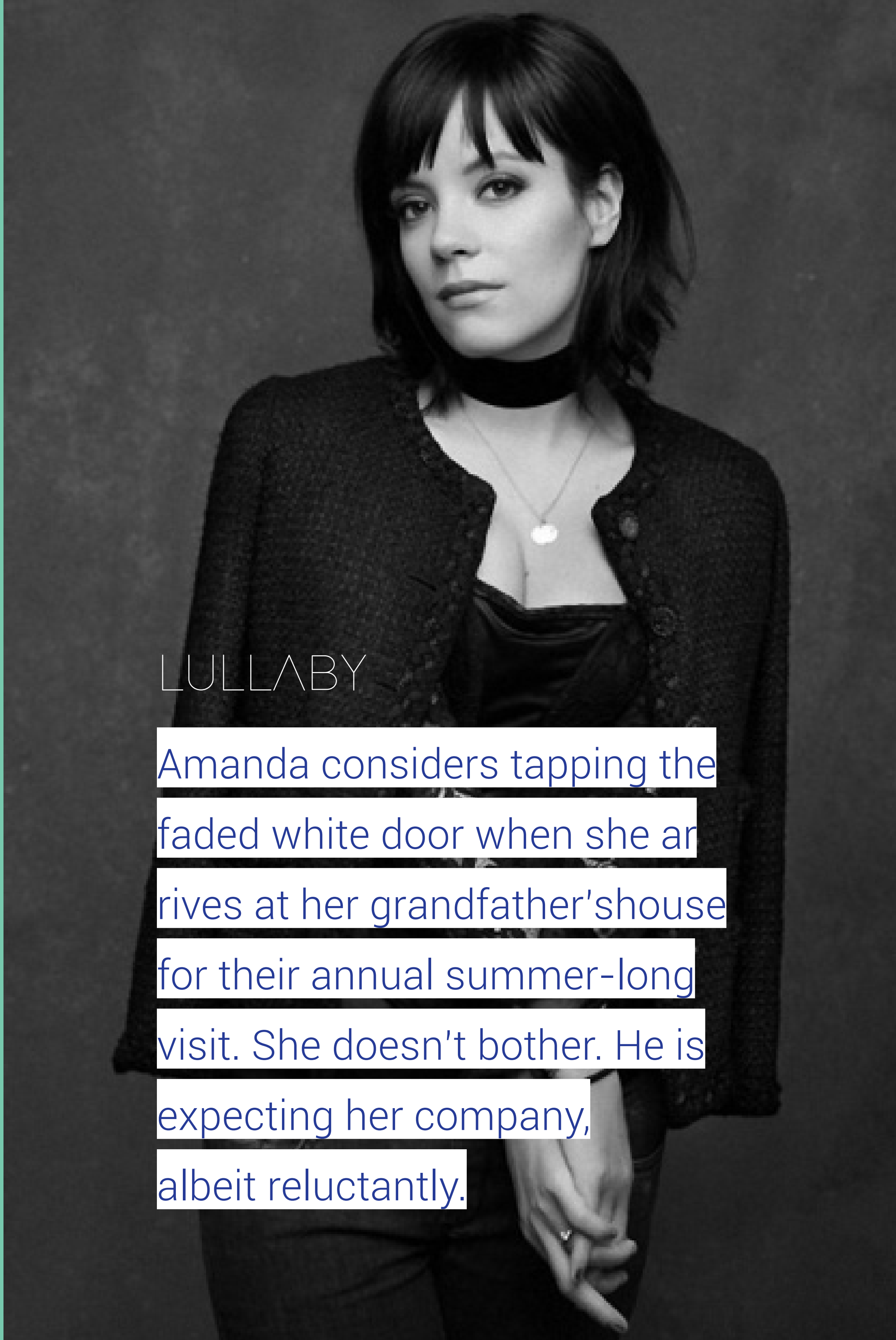
CERVIDAE
Lauren Senkmajer


Ebb and flow.
FRIDA
Lauren Senkmajer

A L L I S O N

ALLISON STEIN

1st Place Richard Colwell Award



LULLABY

Amanda considers tapping the
faded white door when she ar
rives at her grandfather'shouse
for their annual summer-long
visit. She doesn't bother. He is
expecting her company,
albeit reluctantly.

Squinting against an opaque sky, Amanda turns the doorknob in a mechanical, rehearsed movement. Amber bangs brush against the sweat droplets dotting her forehead. She would not doubt if this were the way her five-year-old self appeared on the porch steps a decade ago, with this precise measure of sunlight filtered through her hair. A broken man's decrepit gingerbread-trim house. A suitcase in her hand and a thin smile on her face. They call it tradition.

She steps inside, and her eyes intersect with his. Wrinkles and scars mar his face in messy constellations. He smells like Pledge furnisher polish and black coffee. "Good morning, Mr. Thompson."

"Amanda."

She waits to be offered a seat, then sits down at the kitchen table without an invitation. "Have you been getting along all right?"

"Getting by."

Amanda nods thoughtfully. They used to talk, really talk, her and Grandpa. When she was a little girl, he told army stories. And when she was a little older, he gave her advice. *All things have their end, their limit,* he used to say. Or, *Don't overvalue life, and don't undervalue death.* Or, *Find yourself a buddy.* But today, she is 16 and he is 87 and long, distorted shadows cast upon a quiet room.

Clint scrutinizes his granddaughter Amanda, first for flaws and second for any sign of happiness. He finds neither.

Perhaps an old man and a little girl languish equally under the gravity

of years, he muses. Clint has not noticed the wrinkles, tiny folds of memory dotting his long-unhappy face. He doesn't believe in mirrors.Yet, his granddaughter's disillusioned emerald eyes, burning on and off like fireflies, make clear the passage of time. A child who used to braid her hair in spare ribbon and twirl around the room in hand-me-down church dresses has died. In her place stands a silent, polite adolescent who has lost the will to dance.

"Are you cared for well enough, Mr. Thompson?" she asks. Her tone is pleasant but flat.

"Doctor calls it post-traumatic stress. It's memories, that's all it is."

"Does Samuel still come around, I wonder?"

"Stops by every evening. Brings me the mail and heats up my dinner."

They share a weak smile. She drums her fingers on the tabletop, he frowns, she stops.

"I suppose you've come to see him," Clint says.

She blushes light vermilion.

"You take care to think before you act."

"I promise."

Amanda waits on the front porch, an airy summer dress caressing her legs. When Samuel fills the picture frame of her peripheral vision, she offers an uneasy smile. She counts the number of times the porch swing carries her toward him, then sharply away. Back and forth. Ebb and flow.Suddenly, he is next to her on the porch swing. Imagine what his mother would say, what her grandfather would do. She smells him—fresh soil and his mum's peach jam. Masculine, almond-shaped eyes radiate azure concern. She knows it is naïve, this unsettling regard for someone else.

He won't stay long.

"You can't stay long," she says finally. "I promised."

"I won't stay long," he says. "I've got to pick up groceries. Mum's having dinner guests tonight."

She opens her mouth, pauses, closes it.

"I've been helping your grandfather get around."

"He doesn't care to be helped."

Before them, shedding white blossoms from the magnolia tree fall to the ground in miniscule pirouettes. A clearing sky bleeds translucent light upon their faces. They exchange a smile. Not a happy smile exactly, but acknowledgement that they feel the same kind of sad.

"I think he likes me all right."

"He says you're all right."

"Lets me call him Clint."

"He likes you then."

Samuel rests his hand atop hers. Their fingertips kiss. She flinches.

"I'm sorry," he says, folding his hands on his lap.

"No, I'm sorry."

They fall silent. Crimson and periwinkle meld in the horizon. Evening air expands their lungs. Cicadas hum a love song, or a lullaby. Fragile adolescent bodies rest against the weathered-wood porch swing, its motion measured and clean.

Samuel hesitates, then pulls a creased envelope from his shirt pocket. "Got a letter come in for your grandfather today."

"Junk mail or obituary?"

"Obituary. Fellow by the name of Dennis James Clementon."

Amanda traces the skyline with her eyes. "DJ," she says quietly.

Clint's mind darts wildly around the room. He studies a single sturdy picture frame, its chipped beige paint having dried in streaks some decades ago. The photo itself is indistinguishable, with colors melded in a blurry iridescence. He focuses on the scent of cinnamon omnipresent in an old-fashioned kitchen, then on the static buzz of a slow-dying radio. And then he looks down at his own hands, at a torn envelope and ink-bled obituary, and this is all there is in the world.

He murmurs the block-letter name in staccato syllables: *Den-nis James Cle-men-ton, Den-nis James Cle-men-ton.*

Amanda's arms rest limply at her sides.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Thompson," she stammers.

He shakes his head.

She shifts from her right foot to her left, dress brushing against sun-bleached wallpaper. "It's hard to love people."

"What does a child know about love?"

Amanda mumbles a lullaby to herself, closing her eyes and trying to close her mind. Tall shadows rest upon the flannel bedspread, its time-faded rosebuds eclipsed by hard streaks of black. Refracted moonlight casts a jagged stream of white warmth through the window—an alternating pattern of light and dark. Her grandfather's spare room smells like memories and insomnia.

In the old days, she would lie awake and listen to Mr. Thompson's breathing. In, out. In, in, out. In, out, out, out. He would gasp, then whimper, then scream. He would explain in the morning that all his army buddies had the same bad dreams.

Amanda used to tip-toe past the monsters in the hallway to reach his bedroom. The summer of her seventh birthday, she would hold his vein-lined hand and sing him a love song, or what she called a lullaby. He would hit her back then, only to murmur an absentminded apology in the morning. He never liked to be comforted, or else he never knew how.

All things have their end, their limit. So do people. Tonight Amanda sleeps through the screams just fine.

Dawn-colored droplets roll down the kitchen windowpane, its surface blurred in pooled condensation. Another morning to squint at the horizon, another sunrise to dry up the water. Clint swears at the sky in a hoarse whisper, so that even he cannot distinguish the end of one word from the beginning of the next. He wants black coffee and death.

Across the oak-stained table slouches his granddaughter's lethargic body. She has never run her frost-white hands along the edge of a bullet, never packed her suitcase for a best friend's funeral, never slept under the spell of those dreams. She is a coward, more afraid of life than death. Pain might well do her good.

"Any sugar for you this morning, Mr. Thompson?" she asks, pouring a pot of lukewarm coffee in his cup.

"No."

Gingerly, she sets the paint-chipped mug before him. She traces his gaze out the window, finds some coordinate on the horizon, frowns.

"Get my suitcase. It's almost time."

Amanda exits the room, her nervous footsteps reverberating throughout the small house, then re-emerges with one suitcase in each hand.

"You are leaving as well?"

"Yes, sir."

Amanda fastens her seatbelt and glances at the skeletal house only once in her rearview mirror. Mid-morning daylight burns bright and hard against the sky, its expanse a sheet of smooth blue glass. Departing from her grandfather's slender driveway, she follows the dirt road, then turns right at the fork, then stops half a mile later in front of Samuel's house. She has memorized this route, not in any purposeful manner but in the way one instinctively

knows the direction of home.

He is waiting for her on his front steps, expecting her.

She puts the car in park and rolls down her window.

"Are you leaving already?"

"I have to."

"Did he hit you?"

"Not this time."

He looks hard at her. She looks down.

His voice cracks. "Your grandfather has a heart, I think.
he's just hurting, too."

"That's not good enough for me anymore."

"I know."

An easy wind tousles their hair. She drums her fingertips against the dash. He leans against her car.

"Mr. Thompson won't be home this evening," she says, her eyes meeting his. "He and some of his army buddies are heading south for DJ's funeral."

"Funerals are tough."

"No. I think most people these days die while they're still alive."

"Ours is a broken world."

Amanda lets her hand dangle from the car window. He smirks, then gives it a quick squeeze. She sings him a lullaby before saying good-bye. He remembers her as the girl who taught him a love song.

2ND PLACE

ELSEWHERE

Kerrie Sparling

They were at it again.

The shattered remains of a broken vase lay at the base of the staircase. The white lilies that had been the vase's occupants laid crushed, wilted petals strewn everywhere. Willow Carter stood gazing at the vase, torn between frustration and remorse. What did her favorite flowers do to deserve such a fate? And *why* were they arguing again so soon? They weren't following the pattern. What did it even matter? Like *they* cared about consistency. Retrieving her jacket from her room, Willow pushed open the front door with a heaving sigh. No one would be missing her anytime soon.

Making her away across the yard, Willow headed for the familiar path that led to her favorite thinking place. The late autumn sun shone brightly through the trees, illuminating her red hair as she moved across the blanket of dying green and a variety of gold, red, and orange hues. The wind and rustling of the leaves were her only companions as the 16-year-old traveled farther and farther away from the angry voices fading away into the background. Soon the crunching of leaves was the only sound that Willow could hear, and for that she was grateful. Nature served as the only real comfort to her as of late.

It wasn't long before the path began to weave into the wider trail that eventually opened into a clearing. Even from a considerable distance away, Willow could make out the massive, looming form of the spider tree. She quickened her pace, coming closer and closer to her destination. The spider tree had stood in the meadow for as long as she could remember. With a trunk that could she could easily fit most of her bedroom in, the tree was old and ugly, towering over the surrounding trees with its thick, gnarled branches reaching in all directions, reminding Willow of a spider web weaved so intricately that no prey could escape, hence the reason she and her brother first dubbed it the "spider tree" all those years ago. Though ominous in appearance, the spider tree served as the ideal getaway, an island in the middle of nowhere, perfect for preferred isolation.

Hoisting her bag onto one shoulder, Willow began to shimmy up the lowest branch that was within arm's reach. Having bypassed that branch and a few

others, she nestled into a comfortable crook that had come to be her favorite spot. Once settled, Willow pulled out a sharp rock she kept hidden in the side of her bag. Moving aside a piece of dead bark, she etched a mark deep into the moist wood. It joined the hundreds of other marks that preceded it, a collection of days she had spent trapped in this situation. The young woman was not sure when she had begun the habit, but it served as a solace to her, a reminder that her situation was only temporary. She would be able to escape soon enough, only had to hang in there for a little longer. Pulling her bag to her, Willow extracted an assortment of books and began to contemplate which story she would escape into.

"I'd figured I'd find you here," came a voice from the shadows.

Without even thinking, Willow took the stone that she still had clutched in her hand and hurled it in the direction of the voice with all her might. A moment passed, and she heard a deep voice curse and the thump of the stone as it rebounded off a nearby tree. Panicking, Willow glanced around for more ammo. How much damage could a paperback cause? Maybe she could stab the intruder in the eye with a mechanical pencil if they came close enough. Who even knew where the spider tree was? Aside from her brother, who knew better than to bother her in her secret place, no one else could possibly know about her secluded whereabouts. Had this person followed her? What if he were some kind of mad, serial rapist? Then what would she do?

Wielding a mechanical pencil in one hand and a hefty textbook in the other, Willow turned towards where the voice had from.

"Come out!" she ordered, attempting to sound brave, though her voice shook. "There's more where that came from!"

A few minutes passed in silence. Finally, a shadow lumbered forward, and a figure came into view. Clad in a dark t-shirt and jeans, a gangly young man emerged into the weak sunlight, his shaggy blond hair disheveled, eyes wide with shock.

"What the hell, Carter!" he shouted.

It took her a moment or two, but Willow was able to put a name to the startled face before her. Reuben Maxwell, the new kid who had just recently moved to Emmett. He was supposedly a star athlete and not a bad student; he already had captured the attention of the staff with his grades and half the female population with his looks at the local high school in the short month that he'd been there. Willow didn't really understand the appeal; he was another stereotypical player type that probably always got what he wanted. Wait...she frowned. What in the world was he doing here?

Willow dropped the book and pencil still clutched in her hands, and with a practiced aim, jumped down from the spider tree. She approached Reuben with caution, acting as though he were a rabid animal, which in a way he

was. He had infiltrated her favorite place, where she thought no one could ever bother her. Willow felt exposed, however silly that sounded; couldn't she have *anything* to herself, something that she didn't have to share with anyone else? Was it so bad that she wanted to be left alone sometimes?

"Damn Carter, flighty much?" Reuben moved closer to her, a crooked smile on his face.

Willow ignored his comment.

"What are you doing here?" she asked quietly. "The only other person who knows about this place is my brother."

Reuben looked surprised.

"Really? It's not that hidden or anything... I can see this tree from my bedroom window; it dwarfs the others. I thought at first that no one else came here since it's not exactly the most beautiful tree around. Then a couple of weeks ago, I noticed some vibrant red hanging around here. From what I understand, you're the only kid at school with hair that bright."

Willow touched her hair subconsciously, gripping the red waves in her pale hand. So, what? He had been spying on her? That made the situation even better.

It was as though he read her mind, for Reuben quickly backtracked.

"I wasn't, like, stalking you or anything! I just happened to notice you out here that one day. And that you seemed to frequent this place a lot. I didn't really get why a girl like you hung out somewhere like here, so I finally came to see what the draw here was."

"Who do you think you are coming over here and scaring the crap out of me?" she yelled. "This is *my* place, not yours! You had no business!" Another thought occurred to her. "And what did you mean a girl like me? What's *that* supposed to mean?"

Hands held up as though he thought she might hit him, Reuben backed up.

"Whoa, chill Carter! I may have scared you, but what else was I supposed to do? Make a loud ruckus as I came over here? I'm sure that would've gone over very well. What would be better, you being terrified for ten minutes about whoever was coming over here, or just being caught a little off guard by someone who was already here? I figured the latter was the better alternative." He took a step forward and offered her a somewhat sheepish smile. "As for the other bit, I just meant that it's sort of strange to see a girl like you hanging out in the middle of the woods. I mean, I've heard all about you. You're *Willow Carter,* top student, shoe-in for valedictorian, Ms. Perfect extraordinaire. I expected you to be kind of like the stuck-up, no fun, all-work-and-no-play type. Not the hanging-around-trees type. Not that I mind.

Makes you seem rugged, more down-to-earth. More...real."

Willow simply stared at him, lost for words. Was he rambling? She did not expect this from Reuben Maxwell, who just last week she saw flirting with three girls simultaneously, all of whom seemed eager to get some piece of him. Mr. Confident, who sauntered around Emmett High like he owned the place. This guy, bashful and tripping over his words? What was he playing at? Willow's green eyes narrowed. Was this just some tactic to get under her skin? Was she next on his list of girls to woo? Willow would rather die than become his next conquest.

But if that was true... why did he hike half a mile just to come find her secret thinking place in the woods? She looked towards where she knew the Max-wells lived. Unlike her property, they did not have a nice, even path that led to the spider tree. To get there, he'd have to have battled through a small jungle of weeds and underbrush. Michigan vegetation was wild and unpredictable. Why go through all that trouble just to find out what she was up to?

She must have been quiet for some time, because Reuben interrupted her train of thought.

"Hey, if I crossed some kind of line, I'm sorry. I was just curious about what you were up to out here. I'll get lost." He turned around to leave.

Willow wasn't sure what possessed her to do it, but before she knew it, she was reaching out and grabbing his arm. "Wait!" she said. "Don't go."

Willow pulled him towards the spider tree. "I come here to think," she found herself saying. "To just be myself and escape from the world for a while."

"Escape from what?" Reuben asked. His head was inclined towards her, his expression quizzical.

Realizing that she was still grasping his arm, Willow hastily let go. She stepped closer to the spider tree, gazing up at the decrepit branches. Why did she come here? What was it about this tree that made her feel like she could forget about her worries, if only for a little while? And what was it about this boy that was suddenly making her so contemplative?

Willow felt a hand on her shoulder. Taking her eyes off the tree, she was met once more with that crooked smile. "Do you want to see something?"

She decided that yes, she did.

3RD PLACE

SMOKE FOR MOM

Autumn Rockerfeller

She took a long drag off her unfiltered Marlboro while sitting on the bench next to me. She slowly pushed the smoke out her black smudged lipstick and she fluffed her bleach blonde hair. She had a piercing above her lip and one in her nose. She had more black eyeliner on her face than the rest of the sopho-more class girls combined. Her eyes were crystal blue and full of mystery.

"Do you want a smoke?" she asked me while still looking at the road ahead.

She was rebellious. Smoking next to the "tobacco free school zone" sign. She had on a Smiths t-shirt and a long black skirt falling just past her knees. She had on broken down combat boots and a worn jean jacket.

"Uh, sure," I replied trying to seem cool.

She reached in her jacket and pulled out a soft red pack. She pulled out a cigarette with her teeth and handed it to me with a smile.

"Thanks," I said sticking the cigarette in my pocket.

I've never smoked and I didn't want to make a fool of myself. Not now any-ways.

She began to chuckle. She took another long drag and exhaled towards me.

"Don't smoke, huh?" she asked.

I started to panic a little. I'm dorky. I spend more time in the chemistry lab per day than my total time in a gym. Dorky guys like me don't talk to girls like her. Cool girls. Not the obnoxiously popular cool girl, but still too cool for me.

"Oh! I do! I just... didn't have a lighter on me otherwise I would have lit this one," I rambled on.

She stuck her slender hand down her shirt and fished between her breasts. It made me nervous. She pulled out a purple lighter with yellow daisies on it.

Damn.

"Here, Stud," she handed me the lighter, winking.

"Thank you…" I said.

I put the cigarette between my lips and lit the cigarette. I could feel her watching me. I took a deep breath. I looked right at her and nodded, as if I was enjoying the smoke that crippled my lungs.

She giggled.

My eyes began to water and I began to cough, a deep barky cough. It was so heavy and obnoxious I swear people on the other side of the country could hear me.

"You alright there, Stud?" she asked me.

"Yeah, just a little tickle," I lied.

"You don't have to lie. Smoking kills anyways. Does more harm than good," she said.

"Why do you do it then? You already know it's bad and killing you!" I snapped.

I didn't like her thinking that I needed her explanation of smoking being dangerous. I knew that, but today I was being cool.

"Ha! Yeah, you're right, Stud. It's bad. Not all of us want an everlasting life though," she explained.

I puffed on the cigarette again, coughing less this time. I still wasn't exactly pro, though.

"You just moved here. How bad can it be?" I asked hoping for her to feel close and vent.

"Listen here, Stud. School isn't sunshine and rainbows for all of us. This place is shit. Just like every other school since Simmons," she replied.

She looked down at the ground. I could feel that she was sad, but that made me curious. I hardly knew her, but it was so easy to talk to her. She flicked her ashes on my foot. I pretended not to notice.

"Why'd you leave?" I asked while taking a drag of the cigarette.

"Guess," she smirked at me.

I was nervous. I didn't want to say the wrong thing and see her to leave. I had been hoping to talk to her for weeks.

"Uh… fighting?" I questioned. I immediately regretted saying that, but it was the only thing that came to mind.

She snorted.

"Is it the piercing and bleached hair? Maybe my smoking? Or my clothes? Ha!"

She was mad. Not mad directly at me, but just mad in general.

"Sorry," I said as I went to stand up.

She pulled me down by my belt. She was strong. It really surprised me.

"Sit. Please. I'm on edge. Hence the excessive smoking," she mumbled to me.

She put the cigarette out on the toe of her boot. It got quiet for a minute. My cigarette burnt out and she seemed antsy.

"So… your Mom late too?" I said hoping to lighten the mood.

"Kinda," She said.

"My Mom's never late. Usually, she's so early and freaks out if I am even two seconds late. It's ridiculous," I ranted.

"Don't be hateful, Stud," she said quietly.

"My name isn't Stud. It's Greyson," I responded.

"Well, Grey, My name is Hatty," she said smiling at me.

"That's really pretty," I said.

"Thanks. My full name is Harriet. I'm named after my Grandma, but Hatty seems less like an eighty year old woman," she laughed.

Her teeth were white and slightly crooked. Her eyes were glassing over from the cold fall wind whipping at us. She grabbed her cigarettes out of her jacket again. She pulled one out with her teeth and held it between two fingers. She shook her pack so one cigarette fell down to the hole. She pointed it towards me and I grabbed it. She fished out her lighter and lit hers. Then handed it to me. I kept flicking the lighter, but the wind kept blowing the flame out.

"Here, Stud. Lemme help ya," she said while grabbing the lighter out of my hand.

She put the lighter up to the cigarette hanging from my lips. She used her hand with her lit cigarette to shield the wind and lit mine with the other hand. Her smoky breath lingered around my face. I had goosebumps from her being so close. She seemed so vulnerable while sitting next to me, I could

almost sense pain.

She smiled and quickly leaned back away from me.

"There ya go, Stud," she said smiling at me.

It had been almost an hour since school let out and she started to look worried. She picked at the skin on her thumbs and wiggled her feet really fast. She put her cigarette out on her boot only half-smoked, and I followed her lead. She was freezing and leaned towards me to block the wind. My mom pulled up in her silver mini-van honking. She rolled down the window and started shouting.

"Greyson, I am so sorry! I got caught up at work! Come on! I'll take your friend too!" She bellowed out the car.

Hatty shook her head and I started to walk towards the car.

"Honey, it's cold! Let me take you home! Your Mom's probably busy!" My mother yelled.

She nodded and followed. She got in the back of the mini-van and told my mom where she live. She grabbed onto my hand and didn't let go the entire time. She was scared, but I wasn't sure why. That was until we pulled into the driveway.

There were a lot of cars outside her house and her driveway was full of cars as well. A man in a suit walked out just as we got there.

"What's going on, Hatty?" I asked.

She smiled with glassy eyes and said, "Just another day in paradise. Mom's probably trying to make a will again. Dad usually kicks the attorney out and they fight for a while. She thinks the lung cancer is going to kill her any day, but dad thinks she's immortal or something,"

I sat on the edge of the seat frozen. I had no idea that she was going through all of that.

"See ya, Stud," she called as she walked to the door.

"Mom, we're only two blocks from home... I'm just going to walk," I said softly.

"No, it's cold. You don't need to catch a cold and miss school. You wouldn't get your attendance award," she lectured.

"Mom, just go. I need to handle this!" I snapped.

I got out of the car and my mom drove away.

"Hatty! Hatty, please stop!" I called to her as she walked to the door.

She turned around and looked at me.

"What? Why aren't you going home?" she asked.

"You didn't say your mom had cancer! Why didn't you tell me?" I asked.

I thought we were getting close, and yet she didn't even tell me about the biggest thing in her life.

"It's not exactly an icebreaker, Greyson. Besides, I hardly even know you!" she yelled.

"You don't even try! You just shut me out! Your mom has lung cancer, but yet you're smoking. Are you trying to get cancer too?" I asked.

"My Mom never even smoked! See, you don't have to do anything wrong in life and still can get screwed over!" she angrily told me.

"Don't be so bitter all the time," I said.

"Fine, if you want to talk, let's talk about you! What's so interesting about Greyson? Why do you want to talk to me? The complicated girl with a dying Mother? The weird girl?" she asked.

"There's nothing interesting about me. I'm a nobody. I spend every free minute I have in the school chemistry lab. I have no friends, and when I saw someone new... I just thought of you as a second chance. To start over," I sadly explained.

"Oh... I didn't know," she said.

I walked towards her and I hugged her. She invited me inside to talk. We sat in her living room which happened to be quiet despite all of the cars. She told me that her family all visited almost every day worrying that Hatty's Mom would pass. We sat on the couch for about an hour just talking about life until I walked home. I felt pretty tired when I went home so I lay in bed and just slept.

The next morning before school I felt her purple lighter in my pocket. I wasn't sure how it got there, but it gave me an excuse to find her. I left for school early and I saw her sitting on the bench.

"Hey," I said nervously.

She looked up and smiled at me.

"Hey!" she replied.

"You forgot your lighter," I said handing it to her.

"I don't need it. I don't smoke anymore," she said.

"Me either," I said.

I guess I never really did.

"See you here after class?" she asked me.

"Yeah, hopefully my Mom's late again," I replied.

AFTER IT ALL FALLS APART

Erica Shkembi

With blood dripping from my extremities, I examine what I have just done. Sweat drips from my forehead piercing my eyes with the stinging burn of hatred. I wipe my brow despite the fact I smeared his blood across my face. I stood frozen wondering if my neighbors had heard his screams, confused them for mine, and turned up their television sets as *The Late Show* continues. I used to wonder when my husband would come home in his drunken fits, if anyone could hear my screams as he would drag me through the house like his own personal rag doll. After the first few times it happened, my questions were answered as the neighbors avoided making any eye contact with me the following days... It was apparent that I was going to be all on my own with this.

My husband Kenny and I used to have a happy marriage, and we used to be "in love." We used to jump in the car spontaneously and head to the nearest beach to bask in the beauty. He'd always look at me declaring my eyes reminded him of the blue ocean water, my hair sandy blonde like the sand, and then he'd kiss me like a girl always dreams of being kissed. After a few years of us trying to have a baby but coming up unsuccessful, the tension grew so thick you could cut it with a knife. I felt like I was just a barren wasteland, and once he felt the same, everything began to change.

He'd tell me in the most disgusted voice: "Angela, maybe if you weren't such a behemoth we could have a child. You're about thirty pounds above your ideal weight per the doctor, and it just seems like you don't even want a child. You're just so damn lazy! Why don't you just get off your fat ass and work out or something?!"

I got so tired of hearing the same things daily, so I once mimicked his voice and replied:

"Maybe you're just an impotent disgrace of a man; did you ever think about that?"

At that moment Kenny didn't think twice; he slapped me so hard my lip bled. I was shocked at the fact that he put his hands on me and froze where I stood for a moment. It started very gradually with just a push and a slap, but I was shocked then. I know I was mad, but the man that had my heart struck me without a second thought. I packed my things, and I left that day. I didn't come back for a whole week. I wasn't going to go back, but Kenny found out which girlfriend I was staying with, showed up with 2 dozen roses, and a brand new car with a big bow on it. He begged and pleaded for my forgiveness and said it would never ever happen again. I believed him; he was so sincere. He took his personal savings for the baby, and bought me the cutest little convertible. Then my girlfriend Trish chimed in after these thoughts were running rampant in my head.

"Angie, if you go back to that man after all of this... I just can't be a part of your life any longer. He's only going to get worse, this is the cycle of the abuser!" she exclaimed right in front of him.

I could do nothing but stand there as tears welled up in my eyes, and then Kenny interjected to throw salt.

"Trish, I wasn't in my right mind. This is my wife, and I love her. Every relationship has its ups, and downs. I made a mistake! If you were a real friend to Angela, you would support her, and not abandon her! Come on, Honey, you don't need friends who are going to be jealous of you anyway."

That was the last day that I spoke to Trish, and she was the first of many friends I've lost in this war I called a marriage. After that, it felt like Kenny and I grew even closer, and everything was going phenomenal until Kenny got fired from his job at the gas company. I had a part time job at a local restaurant, and decided since we needed the money, I'd ask for more shifts. I began working full time at the diner and became the sole bread winner of the house. I did whatever I could to save money. I joined a couponing group that really taught me how to shop savvy and even closed our credit cards to limit unnecessary spending. However, this only ignited the flame within him to drink his days away and blame me for just about anything that went wrong.

At first, I could cover the bruises on my face with make-up because he didn't hit me as hard as he could. The girls at work couldn't tell the difference, and I am a trained, very skilled make-up artist anyway. Eventually, it got to the point my left eye swelled shut, and since then I really haven't been able to see correctly out of that eye. One girl I worked with noticed the gobs of make-up on my face around my eye especially, and though she was about 6 years younger than I am, she spoke up.

"Hey Angie, can I talk to you for a minute?" she whispered.

"Everything okay Rita?" I replied.

"Well, I just noticed that you've only lately started wearing a ton of make-up, and I haven't really known you to wear all that much. When I was looking at you earlier, it kind of looks like right under your eye is A bruise. Are things okay at home? I'm just worried about you. I hope I'm not overstepping any boundaries"

"I'm fine Rita! Now is NOT the time to discuss my personal business, and honestly it's nothing. Thanks for reaching out, but it's really not what you think!"

"Okay, well, I'm just concerned because I left my husband after he got extremely abusive, and I just want you to know that I'm here for you. If you need anything at all, please do not hesitate to ask."

"Duly noted, and thank you Rita... Again, I am fine. I didn't mean to snap at you, but we should probably get back to work before we get cooked for slacking out here"

I smiled and angrily continued with my work, and for the rest of my shift I contemplated if everyone could see what Rita saw. It was then that I decided he was far out of control, and I would confront him when I got home. I finished my double shift, and proceeded home after a long day. When I finally arrived at home, the house was empty, and I found a note on the kitchen table that read:

"Went to the bar with the boys, won't be home for dinner, and don't wait up. -Ken"

Regardless of him telling me not to wait up, I got so involved in cleaning that I didn't even realize the time. I cleaned everything, threw dinner together, and he didn't arrive home until 12:30 am. I heard a car pull into the driveway, and it was a car I've never seen before. Sure enough, my husband saunters out of the passenger seat and walks around to the driver's side. The tinted window to the sports car rolls down, and it is a woman. I watch in awe as my husband leans down, kisses her passionately, and her eyes glaze over like mine used to. That is when I stepped out on the porch initiating a confrontation, and the woman's love-struck awe turned to complete terror.

As I'm on the porch yelling, Kenny signaled to this unnamed woman to leave, and she barreled down the driveway in reverse. At that moment, I couldn't even tell you who I was, I was so angry. Kenny stormed the porch, grabbed me by the hair, and dragged me in the house kicking and screaming. He then started shouting at me about how I screwed everything up. As bits of my hair were ripping out and creating a trail of broken strands from the door to the bedroom, he continued yelling at me about how I hold him back, how stupid and useless I was, and proceeded to throw me into our dresser.

As we were wrestling around, he cocked his fist back, and plunged it into the side of my face. I could hear the snap of my cheek bone, and my face began to pulsate a heat I'd never felt before. I lost consciousness, and when I woke

up, I was stripped naked lying in bed. I looked around the bedroom, but could barely see anything due to my cheek swelling to the size of a grapefruit. With my left eye, I could just make out a pile of clothes mangled with blood, and I knew he had robbed me of my choice of intimacy as well by defiling me. I realized that I had one of two choices; I could be the victim or take charge and save myself. I grabbed a pair of shorts and a tank top and snuck out of the bedroom to find him. As I crept into the living room the clock read 1:25 am, and there he was sitting in the recliner watching *The Late Show*, laughing at the comedy segment.

I don't know what came over me in that moment. I grabbed the vase on the table in the hall, and I smashed it into a million pieces on his head. He lost consciousness, and blood oozed from his scalp. I panicked as I ran to the garage, and grabbed the rope used to secure a tarp that covers our firewood in the winter. I tied him as tight as I could to the chair with the tightest fisherman's knot I learned to tie when I was a girl scout. I dashed into the kitchen, and grabbed the biggest hammer I could find in the junk drawer. I then positioned myself right in front of him so that I'd be the first thing he seen when he woke up, and I knew it wouldn't be long.

Sure enough, five minutes later his eyes stirred behind his eye lids, and he started to come to. He said nothing; he just glared at me.

"Fine, since you are going to say absolutely nothing at all… I'll talk" I sneered hatefully. "I am going to inflict every bit of pain on you, that you have inflicted on me, and I'm going to start the same way you did. I'm going to start slow, and I'm going to finish strong. I want you within an inch of your life, begging to die, because that is how I've felt throughout these last five years, and if you were smart, you'd say absolutely NOTHING."

He winced as my voice grew louder and louder.

I started smacking him in the face, but then when I realized I couldn't punch with the same impact he could, I grabbed my hammer from the end table. I proceeded to slam the hammer into his fingers and up his forearms so that if he got out of his entrapment, his injuries would render him useless. I plunged the butt of the hammer into his face, which busted the bridge of his nose opened, spraying bursts of blood all over me. He screamed out at every stroke of the hammer, at every blast mangling him, and then I just stopped. I thought revenge would feel good. Though I imagined myself becoming strong enough to inflict the same torture on him that he inflicted on me, it was not nearly as rewarding as even movies make it seem to be.

It was then that I stopped and grew disgusted with myself. I retreated into the kitchen and put the hammer away after I cleaned it. I walked back out to the living room and just waited for him to wake up. I stood there, covered in blood, contemplating my next move. I decided to call the police. Whether I'd go to jail or not, it was time to own up to my behavior and let them decide.

As I called 911, I watched Kenny shift in his seat, and as I explained my emergency the dispatcher went quiet at my details. It wasn't even five minutes, and the police arrived. As they approached me on my porch peering into my brightly lit up house, they asked if he was dead. I chuckled a bit, and said that he wasn't. A female officer followed behind the two men who preceded her, and she looked as though she sympathized with me. She explained to me how important it was that I should've called previously, but she understood with all the trauma I had experienced that I may not have been thinking clearly. I knew I needed a good defense attorney because I would be detained for assault charges, and he would be booked for that and rape. However, we would first be escorted to the local hospital for treatment, and we would be released to Clarion County as soon as we were well enough.

I was more than willing to cooperate, so they didn't feel a show for my neighbors was necessary. As I was escorted to the ambulance, I saw them carrying Kenny out on the gurney, and he wouldn't even look at me. We were taken to the same hospital, and cuffed to our beds. Well, I was cuffed to my bed; I don't really know about him. A few hours after my exam, a nurse entered the room, and looked very uncomfortable but called out to me anyway.

"Mrs. Marcopone?"

"Yes?" I groaned.

"We have some pretty intense news, and I know you've been through a lot tonight."

"What is that? Is everything okay?"

"No ma'am, we ran some tests, and found out that you are six weeks pregnant."

"I'm what?!"

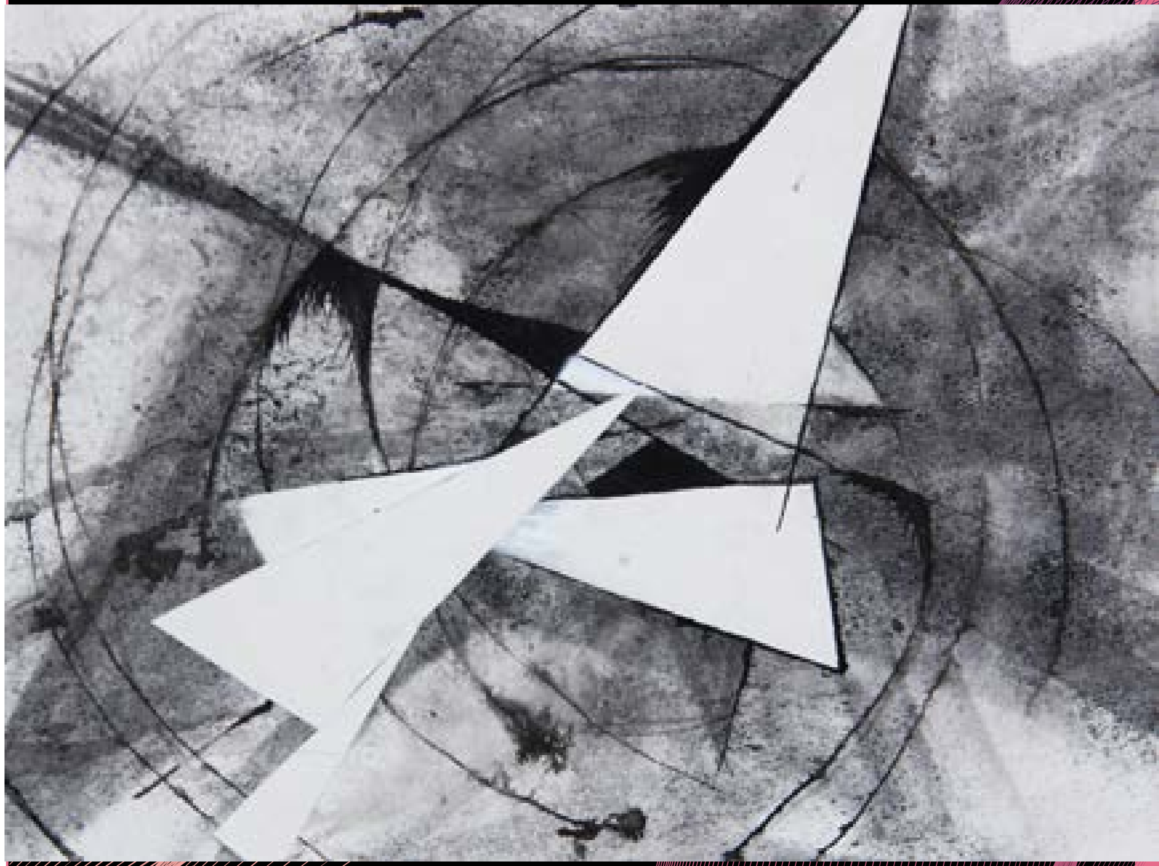
"You are pregnant ma'am. If you need anything, please don't hesitate to ask."

"Thank you." I sighed. Utter confusion raced through my entire body, and my pulse jumped up to alarming levels. After it all falls apart, we get what we've always wanted.

LAST CALL

David Miller

The man walks into the bar, water running down his long coat as he escapes the storm outside. The bar is dark, lit by neon signs and billiard lights. A haze fills the room from cigarettes and cigars. The few patrons turn and stare at the newcomer as he takes a seat at the end. The bartender walks over and asks what the man wants. He orders a whiskey neat. The other patrons return to their conversations, stealing glances at the disheveled man. The bartender returns with the drink. The man shotguns it and asks for another. The bartender complies. What does he care? He's seen too many drunkards and alcoholics to be concerned what a man puts into his body. The man takes his time with this drink. He savors the burning liquid as it warms his insides and dulls his senses. He thinks about the night. How perfect the storm is. It matches his mood and his actions. A group of patrons sit down the bar from the man. They smell of beer and whiskey and filth. They invite the man over to join in their debauchery. The man ignores them. One walks over and tries to start a conversation. The man continues to ignore him. The patron gets upset and curses at the man then asks himself, who does this asshole think he is? What makes him too good to drink with us? The man turns and stares, his face a mask and his eyes a warning. The patron returns to his compatriots, disturbed by what he saw. Who is this man? Not someone to be trifled with. The man orders his third drink. Sirens can be heard from the parking lot. Two cops burst in through the front door, their guns drawn. They aim at the man and bark commands. The man slowly and deliberately finishes his drink. He knows that we won't be able to enjoy the taste for a long time. The cops get anxious. They order him to step away from the bar and put his hands behind his head. The man complies. His face is emotionless. One cop approaches the man while the other provides cover. The patrons watch silently. The man is forced over a table and his hands are cuffed. One cop on each side, the man is marched out of the bar into the rain. Lightning strikes, followed shortly by a burst of thunder. The man smiles. Yes, the weather is perfect.

MOVEMENT AND CONTOUR

Jana Vanmeter